



## INTRODUCTION TO BOOK REVIEWS

### *Travels and exhibitions in the making of national or imperial identities,* by Filipa Lowndes Vicente

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### TRAVELS AND EXHIBITIONS IN THE MAKING OF NATIONAL OR IMPERIAL IDENTITIES

These four book reviews, written by Nicolás Barbosa López, Pedro Lopes de Almeida, Remington L. Stuck and Torin Spangler, were part of the written assignments for the Seminar I taught at Brown University in the Fall Semester of 2016-2017. As Visiting Professor at the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies in the realm of the FLAD/Brown Visiting Professorship, I was challenged to design and teach a 13-week course to be offered (in English) in the department. The course was titled “Travels and Exhibitions: writing, collecting and displaying the world in the 19th and 20th centuries.”

The four graduate students who enrolled in and completed my course were a very homogenous group, something that facilitated the project of developing their written assignments into scholarly articles. On the one hand, they were all in the early stages of their PhDs. On the other hand, and despite the diversity of their backgrounds from literature to media studies, they all shared the same intellectual and critical engagement, which allowed for a rewarding teaching and learning experience.

Through the entangled histories of traveling, collecting, exhibiting, writing, and photographing, this course explored the cultural, political, and intellectual history of different geographical spaces that, in specific historical periods - from Brazil, to Angola and Goa - had a relationship with Portugal. This relationship was most often a colonial relationship where Portugal was the hegemonic nation, imposing its presence and dominance over other geographical spaces in the 18th or in the 20th centuries, very often through violence, inequality, and exploitation. 19th and 20th century Portugal's marginal and peripheral position in Europe (and the willingness to contradict this) was also addressed in relation to technological “progress”, as well as in relation to other European colonial powers. Underlying our approach is the belief that a political, cultural, and intellectual history should be intertwined in the practices of circulation and display of objects, images, and ideas, in a period when the different elites greatly invested their resources in the visual representation of public knowledge. Beyond Portuguese masculine elites - embodied as travelers, collectors, writers, exhibition organizers, photographers - I am interested in non-white (and non-male) intellectual producers from those spaces under Portuguese colonial governments.

Through comparative and transnational case studies, we engaged in discussions about the relationship between knowledge and colonial and national contexts; the interdependence between ideological agendas and exhibition and collecting projects; the affirmation of national and imperial identities through spaces of visual and material knowledge; travel as metaphor; photography and exhibitions as a transgression of time and space; the appropriation and circulation of Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira's Brazilian collections between Brazil, Lisbon and Paris from the 18th to the 19th centuries; the botanist Welwisch's natural history expedition in Angola in the mid-19th century; photography in Angola and in Goa in the late 19th century and in the early 20th century; the European grand tours of King D. Pedro V of Portugal and of his Uncle D. Pedro II, the Emperor of Brazil; Portuguese participation in Universal and Colonial Exhibitions; Goa's intellectual and cultural history, in its relationships with British Colonial India as well as Portugal, or Europe; colonial comparisons between British and Portuguese spaces; or travel and travel writing by women across different frontiers.

The challenges of placing the Lusophone case in a wider global context, both historically and theoretically, were also addressed in all the cases studied. Especially having in mind that the historiography on such subjects is dominated by the British Imperial world, we searched for ways of placing the Portuguese case within a wider context. Circulation, mobility, but also the crossing of frontiers between geographies that tend to remain historiographically separated, were at the center of our reflections.

The evaluation of the students' performance encompassed a 25-page research paper on a subject of their choice, related to the general theme of the course; and a shorter one that consisted of writing a review of a book. The only criterion was that the book should be a recent publication preferably in English, and on a subject related to the course. These four reviews published here are the reworked version of this task.

As it has been widely discussed in recent years, publications in English language, particularly in Britain and North America, are now sought as a means to bring Portuguese related topics into the international scholarly sphere. One of the authors, Remington Stuck, chose a book published in Madrid, but written in French. The other three authors chose books published in North-American university presses. Despite their different origins and first languages, all students could read Portuguese and some used this skill in the sources they used for their final papers. All books are good examples of the growing presence of Portuguese, Brazilian, or Angolan related subjects within an international readership that tends to have English as the language that enables a wider and more diverse dialogue. Even if it is still relevant to publish in our own countries and languages, it is no longer possible to resist the hegemony of the English language as the language of academic and intellectual discourse. More productive than to simply resist to such trend may be to embrace what has been already taking place for many years now: to actively pursue a voice within a global conversation,

even if this means that we have to write, read, or, as it happened with this course, teach, in a language that is not our own first language, which always demands extra effort.

The reviews written by Nicolás Barbosa López, Pedro Lopes de Almeida, Remington L. Stuck and Torin Spangler, the graduate students I had the privilege of meeting during my one semester teaching experience at Brown are, thus, the result of this encounter between four graduate students and authors interested in the history, culture and literature of Portuguese-speaking countries and four books written by four scholars and authors of different origins, whose work also focuses on Portuguese-speaking countries: Ana Lúcia Araújo writes on Brazil as seen by a French traveller artist; Alejandra Uslenghi, on Latin American Exhibitions abroad; Delinda Collier analyzes an artistic practice across time, from colonial Angola to contemporary Angola; while Nadia Vargaftig writes on colonial exhibitions in Portugal and Italy, a research project that began as a doctoral dissertation, which also brought her to ICS-ULisboa, with António Costa Pinto as her host, both as a visiting graduate student and, later, as a Casa de Velázquez post-doctoral fellow. To have four young male scholars, at the onset stages of their promising careers, writing on four female scholars, can somehow exemplify some of the rich work on Portuguese-speaking countries that is being done in different parts of the world.

Filipa Lowndes Vicente (editor)

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